

Power of Reflective Practice: Teacher Action Research at the UCLA Lab School

Abstract

Elementary school teachers play a unique role in preparing students to be ethical, reflective, and engaged participants in our communities. Yet teachers are frequently the object of school reform policies rather than active participants in the creation of those policies. They are mandated to use specific instructional materials and models. They are held accountable for student outcomes on assessments. Such reforms situate teachers as recipients of expertise – from policymakers, researchers, and publishers. The goal of the proposed session is to offer a strong counterargument to such approaches to school reform. The heart of this argument will be three cases of teacher-initiated and teacher-driven research. These cases of teacher research address different topics—socio-emotional wellness and conflict mediation, dual language instruction, pedagogical documentation and reflection in inquiry—and take different forms. However, they are all stories of teachers generating knowledge about teaching and learning in collaboration with university researchers. Participants in each project were involved in developing an instructional model, or evaluating how an existing model made a difference for student learning, and then refining the approach based on the systematic observation and reflection. Through sharing these three cases, we focus on ways that teachers are asserting professional expertise, redefining their professional identities as teacher researchers, and forming mutually beneficial partnerships with university researchers.

Call for Participation

We are structuring the session as three roundtable conversations. Each roundtable will feature one of the three cases of teacher-initiated and teacher-driven research. Teacher and graduate student researchers at each table will share the story of their collaboration and student learning using video, photos, student work and other artifacts. We will ask all participants to share their observations and questions related to the role of teacher as researcher. Participants will have an opportunity to visit all three tables. To conclude the session, we will convene the whole group for a brief discussion of cross-cutting themes.

In advance of the session, we encourage all participants to consider the following questions: What is teacher action research? What can we learn from teacher action research? How is teacher action research similar to, or different from, the day-to-day work of teaching? If you have participated in teacher action research, we also encourage you to share your experiences, findings, and questions.

Organizing Team

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